

## CÔTE D'IVOIRE RESEARCH NOTE

**In frantic search of a paddle**

Although his *Comité politique* is described as a 'forum for reflection and discussion'<sup>1</sup>, the former Speaker's recent peregrinations have, unmistakably, been those of a prospective presidential candidate in the 2020 election. Over the last week, however, **Guillaume Soro's political prospects have run into some significant setbacks.**

1) Since losing his post as head of the National Assembly, Soro has maintained a frenetic schedule. He has made a triumphant return to his native Ferkessédougou, hard by the border with Burkina Faso; ) to pay a **public tribute to Ouattara's rival Henri Konan Bédié**; and finally, **hosted successive delegations of supporters** at his residence in the Marcory district of the capital.

2) He has used each encounter to needle the leader of the Unified RHDP party, while making pointed allusion to the role of the Forces Nouvelles in creating Ouattara's initial path to the presidency. At the same time, the **Enfant terrible has made no secret of his presidential ambitions**, declaring regularly, "*ils m'ont pris mon fauteuil. Moi je veux fauteuil*" (sic)<sup>2</sup>.

As such it is no surprise that Soro has now launched a 'petition', with a goal of securing 800,000 signatures, that will supposedly guide his decision on whether or not to run in 2020. What is noteworthy, however, is the timing of this 'campaign'.

3) It is less than week since one of his former insurgent comrades<sup>3</sup> chose to remind the public that **Soro's role in the Forces Nouvelles was purely incidental**, viz.:

*"Soro ne peut pas dire qu'il a aidé Ouattara à être président. Il n'a pas aidé Ouattara. C'est nous qui avons mené cette guerre, et Soro a fait de la récupération."*<sup>4</sup>

4) That same week, the Minister of defence<sup>5</sup> announced a major reshuffle in the armed services that saw a number of former *Forces Nouvelles* principals<sup>6</sup> transferred from command to staff positions. The démarche was almost certainly intended **to sideline commanders whom Soro might try and persuade to foment unrest in the barracks.**

As will be recalled, this is precisely what happened in early 2017, when a series of mutinies erupted shortly after the entry into force of a new Constitution that effectively demoted Soro<sup>7</sup>.

5) However, **the most serious blow to Soro's political prospects has been struck in Ouagadougou** where the treason trials arising from the coup attempt of September 2015 are proceeding apace. One of the key pieces of evidence presented is a recording of a conversation between defendant Djibril Bassolé<sup>8</sup> and none other than **Guillaume Soro, who can be heard egging on the beleaguered insurgents** with promises of financial and tactical support.

<sup>1</sup> Ostensibly, neither a political party nor a movement.

<sup>2</sup> Delivered with mock petulance, the line always draws peals of raucous laughter from his audience.

<sup>3</sup> I.e. Sanogo Ousmane Kader, one of the handful of junior officers who launched the Sept. 2002 insurrection.

<sup>4</sup> See "*17 ans après, de graves révélations sur la rébellion de 2002, Kadhafi, Compaoré et des proches de Ouattara cités, une plainte annoncée contre Soro*"; *L'Infodrôme*, Mar. 10, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> I.e. Ouattara confidant Hamed Bakayoko.

<sup>6</sup> Including Chérif Ousmane (a.k.a. Papa Guépard) and Issaka Ouattara (a.k.a. Wattaou).

<sup>7</sup> The new Constitution shifted the line of presidential succession from the Speaker to the newly created post of Vice President.

<sup>8</sup> A member of the Berets Rouges, alongside Blaise Compaoré, until the latter seized power following the assassination of President Thomas Sankara in 1987, (retd.) Gen. Bassolé then served as minister for, first Security, and then Foreign Affairs until the regime was driven from power in Oct. 2014. The Sept. 2016 coup attempt was led by Bassolé and (retd.) Gen. Diendéré, with the clear objective of reinstating the Compaoré regime.

Even more shockingly, **he is then heard recommending the physical liquidation**<sup>9</sup> of the head of the Transitional Government and the president of the National Assembly<sup>10</sup>.

6) Appearing before the tribunal last Friday, the former head of government (now serving as Defence minister), testified that **Soro had approached him during a 2015 conference of francophone parliamentarians in Paris, and attempted to ‘clarify’ his unfortunate choice of words** during the exchange under discussion.

Naturally, *l’interessé* denies having made either the damning call to Bassolé or the subsequent clean-up attempt in Paris. However, the tribunal is likely to attach considerable weight to the fact that **within hours of the recorded conversation, the sum of CFA 500,000 was delivered to the location specified over the phone**, where it was duly picked up by one of Bassolé’s men.

7) In the light of the foregoing, one detects **a whiff desperation** about Soro’s sudden decision to launch a *de facto* opinion poll on whether he should stand for president in 2020. He appears to be **a man in a hurry, but with neither a credible record nor an organizational structure**, who senses the door(s) slamming shut on his grand ambitions.

*For the time being at least, **bond-holders can sit back and enjoy the spectacle.***

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<sup>9</sup> Respectively, Chérif Sy and the late Salif Diallo (who died of natural causes in 2017).

<sup>10</sup> The former ‘Bogota’ is then heard explaining that he himself has had to resort to such extreme measures, and he makes explicit reference to the extra-judicial execution in Abidjan, in April 2011, of the same Ibrahim “IB” Coulibaly who had helped launch the 2002 insurrection.

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